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ELECTION OF LATIN BY FRESHMEN IN OBERLIN COLLEGE

BY LOUIS E. LORD
Oberlin College

It has occurred to me that a presentation of the facts about the election of Latin by Freshmen in Oberlin college might be of interest. I also hope that some useful suggestions may be offered which may lead to a change in conditions which I believe to be fairly typical.

The Freshman class at Oberlin is drawn from an unusually wide constituency. Over half of the Freshmen come from outside of Ohio. They come in large part from the territory of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. Last year only two states (South Carolina and Tennessee) were not represented in the student body at Oberlin. The students who come to Oberlin should therefore represent rather well the feeling toward Latin in the territory of the Middle West and South.

TABLE I

	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Freshmen.....	264	264	285	344	297
Number presenting 4 units of Latin.....	136	154	156	198	162
Per cent presenting 4 units of Latin.....	51.5	58	54.7	57.6	54.6
Number electing Freshman Latin.....	83	96	69	75	67
Per cent of those qualified who did elect Latin.....	61	62.3	44.2	38	41.3

Two units of Latin are required for entrance, four are recommended. No Latin is required in college. Till recently no Latin below the fifth year was offered in college, and those who presented two or three units were unable to continue the study of the language unless they wished to enter the academy. In the tables given below no account is taken of such students. While students were not required to take Latin in college, the electives of the Freshman year were restricted to a limited group of subjects of which Latin was one. Election of Latin was thus encouraged. In Table I the

term "Freshman" includes a few special students of Freshman rank who were qualified to elect the subjects open to Freshmen. This shows that less than half of those who came to college prepared to continue the study of Latin cared to do so when it was not required and when it came into competition with science, modern languages, literature, and history.

In 1911 the requirements for graduation were changed and the class which entered that fall did so under new conditions. A year of mathematics had till this time been required of all students who expected to receive a degree. Since 1911 the requirement has been a year of either mathematics or an ancient language. Most students who choose the latter alternative take Latin. Those who elect Greek are not considered in this study. A student may take both mathematics and Latin. If he elects mathematics he must select (in addition to a number of required courses) three hours from the following subjects; modern languages, science, Latin, Greek, history, English literature (a few elementary courses). Here again Latin is in a favored group. The absolute requirement in mathematics had for years been unpopular with the students, and the friends of the classics were very hopeful that the alternative requirement of an ancient language or mathematics would result in a very much larger election of Latin and Greek. The results are tabulated in Table II. This was a distinct disappointment. The number of

TABLE II

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915
Freshmen.	291	312	330	303	312
Number presenting 4 units of Latin.	147	148	151	142	152
Per cent presenting 4 units of Latin.	50.5	46.1	45.8	46.9	48.7
Number electing Freshman Latin.	71	70	84	82	76
Per cent of those qualified who did elect Latin.	48.3	47.3	55.6	57.7	50.0

Freshmen taking Latin was not greatly increased; after five years it stands at 76 instead of 67, and the percentage of those who are equipped to go on with Latin who actually do so under these favorable conditions is not what an enthusiast could wish. The Freshmen all make their choice of studies at home before coming to Oberlin, so that any local prejudice against the classics, if such

exists, is not to be taken into account. In fact, the percentage of students from the Oberlin high school who continue their Latin in college is much above the average of the Freshman class. The situation is somewhat improved at present because we are now offering third- and fourth-year Latin in college classes for the benefit of those who present but two or three units of Latin.

From another point of view the situation is fraught with gloom. I mean the small number of men who choose the Latin alternative. The so-called "Freshman Latin" class always contains a number of students from other classes. This accounts for the discrepancy between the figures given in Table III and those given above.

TABLE III

	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915
Number in "Freshman Latin" {Men.	15	14	23	14	11
{Women.	68	68	76	73	81
{Total.	83	82	99	87	92
Percentage of men in Latin.	18	17	23	16	12
Number in "Freshman mathe- {Men.	91	90	95	65	83
{Women.	62	73	67	66	54
{Total.	153	163	162	131	137
Percentage of men in mathematics.	60	55	58	50	60

I have presented these facts fully because I believe them to be typical of the situation in most of our larger colleges. Can one fairly say that high-school pupils come to college with such a distaste for Latin that only half of them care to continue studying it? Or is Latin so wretchedly taught in the colleges that half of the Freshmen know in advance that they do not want to tamper with it? No doubt the mere desire to change—to fly to some evil that they know not of—influences many; and it is well to remember that to most people a knowledge of the habits and character of *cos ϕ* seems more "practical" than all ancient lore; still I am sometimes led to wonder if more students could not be sent up from the secondary schools at least willing, if not anxious, to know the masterpieces of Latin literature, Livy and Tacitus, Catullus and Horace.